

## **Federal Budget misses opportunity to unlock system for health consumers**

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) and its members have mixed reactions to the 2017-18 Federal Budget, noting that the Federal Government has made important commitments to disability and mental health services. However, AHPA also notes that this is a Budget that fails many health consumers and allied health practices by delaying the reintroduction of indexation for MBS rebates for allied health services.

“This is a budget with some positives for the Australian health consumers in need of allied health services. The government’s commitment to funding the shortfall for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services provides greater security for individual and families experiencing disability and the allied health service providers that support them”, said Lin Oke, Executive Officer of AHPA.

“AHPA also welcomes the new investment into mental health services, in particular the recognition of the importance of increasing access to psychological services through telehealth and committing funding to support people with mental health issues not eligible for the NDIS.”

“However AHPA is disappointed that at a time when chronic and complex illnesses are the biggest health threat for Australians, the government has not lifted the freeze on the indexation of allied health MBS items. This sends the wrong message about the value of allied health primary care services that can improve health outcomes and prevent avoidable complications and hospitalisation.”

Allied health practices are increasingly struggling to provide services for consumers who lack the ability to pay privately due to ongoing freezes of both Medicare and Department of Veteran’s Affairs (DVA) funding. Low rebate levels are exacerbated by the small number of funded allied health consultations available through Chronic Disease Management and Better Access to Mental Health Medicare funding.

Professor Brendan Murphy, Australia’s Chief Medical Officer, noted last week that out of pocket health care costs now made up a third of total health expenditure and was increasingly leading to the risk of a health system that no longer provided universal care.

“Professor Murphy’s statement reflects what our members are telling us, which is that the public system is failing the people that need care”, said Ms Oke.

“We call upon the government to make an urgent commitment to reintroducing indexation to Medicare-funded allied health services now, not delaying it until July 2019, and to reviewing the adequacy of Medicare rebates for allied health services.”

### **Media contact**

Please direct media inquiries to Lin Oke, Executive Officer, AHPA on 0414 473 482.

## **About Allied Health Professions Australia**

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) consists of 22 national allied health professional association members and a further four associations with whom it is formally allied. The collective membership of these 22 national associations is almost 95,000 allied health practitioners, with more than 12,000 working in rural and remote localities in Australia. AHPA and its association members play a key role in promoting the role of allied health practitioners and in advocating for their needs.

Allied health professionals represent almost 20% of the health workforce, providing diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation, often autonomously and across a variety of public, private and not-for-profit settings. Australia's 175,000 allied health professionals deliver an estimated 200 million health services annually. Together with doctors and nurses, allied health professionals are regarded as the third pillar of health care in Australia.